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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASTANA 000297

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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: MFA OFFICIAL URGES A POTUS VISIT

REF: A. ASTANA 0264

[1](#)B. ASTANA 0268

Classified By: Ambassador Richard E. Hoagland, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: During a February 18 with Pol-Econ Chief, MFA Americas Department Director Askar Tazhiyev pressed for a POTUS visit to Kazakhstan in the near future. This would send a clear signal to Russia that the United States remains fully engaged in Central Asia, and would support Kazakhstan's "multi-vector" foreign policy, he argued. Tazhiyev expressed concerns about the flow of Afghan narcotics into Kazakhstan, and hinted that the Kazakhstanis might be able to assist Afghan farmers with alternative livelihood programs. He maintained that the U.S. and Kazakhstan sides have slightly divergent views on the focus of the Public-Private Economic Partnership Initiative (PPEPI), and hoped that PPEPI could accommodate both. Pol-Econ Chief told Tazhiyev that if Kazakhstan is serious about pursuing a Middle East-South Asia (MESA) seat on the IAEA Board of Governors, it needs to first confirm with the MESA members that they recognize Kazakhstan to be part of the MESA group. END SUMMARY.

MFA OFFICIAL URGES POTUS VISIT

[1](#)2. (C) During a February 18 meeting with Pol-Econ Chief, new MFA Americas Department Director Askar Tazhiyev urged a POTUS visit to Kazakhstan in the near future. He claimed that there is a perception that the United States has been pulling back from Central Asia in recent years, and is not willing to put resources and high-level political muscle into the region, including in promoting regional integration among the five Central Asian countries. Meanwhile, a "powerful neighbor" - i.e., Russia -- continues to pursue its own strategic objectives, and is increasing its influence in Central Asia in spite of the fact that the global financial crisis has weakened its economy. According to Tazhiyev, a POTUS visit to Kazakhstan would send a very clear signal to the "powerful neighbor" that the United States is not abandoning the playing field in Central Asia, but rather remains fully engaged in the region. It would also bolster

Kazakhstan's "multi-vector" foreign policy (which entails balancing relations with Russia, China, the United States, and Europe).

13. (C) A POTUS visit, Tazhiyev continued, would allow the United States to draw attention to a successful, moderate Muslim country, one that abandoned nuclear weapons, supports international non-proliferation efforts, and is soon to take over as OSCE chairman-in-office. He suggested that the visit could be a stopover in the middle of a POTUS trip to Europe and Asia.

#### CONCERNS ABOUT AFGHAN NARCOTICS

14. (C) Tazhiyev hinted that the Kazakhstanis might be willing to do more on the economic side in Afghanistan. He explained that the Kazakhstani government has particular concerns about the narcotics flow from Afghanistan. Kazakhstan was once just a transit country for Afghan narcotics, but has now become a destination country too -- with devastating consequences. Hence, Kazakhstan is interested in the prospects for promoting alternative livelihoods for Afghan farmers. There might be opportunities, he suggested, for large Kazakhstani agricultural enterprises to help in this area. (NOTE: As far as we know, this is the first time a Kazakhstani government official has suggested this. We will follow up with other interlocutors here. END NOTE.)

#### SLIGHTLY DIVERGENT VIEWS ON PPEPI

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15. (SBU) Tazhiyev reminded Pol-Econ Chief that he attended Deputy Prime Minister Orynbayev's February 11 meeting with the Ambassador and AmCham representatives to discuss next steps on the Public-Private Economic Partnership Initiative (PPEPI). According to Tazhiyev, the U.S. and Kazakhstani sides still have slightly different views of the focus for PPEPI. In his understanding, while the U.S. participants see it principally as a vehicle for making policy recommendations to the Kazakhstani government, the Kazakhstanis want to use the initiative to highlight their economic reforms and thus draw greater interest from prospective investors. He expressed the hope that PPEPI would be able to accommodate both objectives. Tazhiyev also said it would be helpful if we could provide information on PPEPI-like initiatives the United States is implementing in other countries.

#### IAEA BOARD OF GOVERNORS SEAT

16. (C) Pol-Econ Chief told Tazhiyev that former MFA Americas Department head Talgat Kaliyev recently reiterated to him Kazakhstan's interest in pursuing a Middle East-South Asia (MESA) seat on the IAEA Board of Governors (ref A). Pol-Econ Chief explained to Tazhiyev that if Kazakhstan is serious about this, then it needs to first confirm with the other MESA members that they recognize Kazakhstan as part of the MESA group. The Kazakhstanis should discuss this with the MESA members both in Vienna and in their national capitals.

17. (C) COMMENT: We recognize that many countries, following their genuine admiration of the Obama election, are angling for an early POTUS visit -- or an invitation to the White House. We have heard Kazakhstan's desire for an Obama visit from President Nazarbayev, State Secretary Saudabayev, Presidential Foreign Policy Advisor Sarybay, Foreign Minister Tazhin, and Senate Chairman Tokayev, as well as from other officials. As Washington invests significant energy in resetting our relationship with Moscow based on objective reality, it would be a powerful signal to the region that we are not in full agreement with President Medvedev that Central Asia is Moscow's "privileged sphere of influence." Of course, we would also welcome visits by Secretary Clinton and other senior U.S. officials -- for exactly the reasons articulated by Tazhiyev. A POTUS visit could be brief, and would not have to come with any significant deliverables. It

is the symbolism that would be the key, including the signal it would send both to Russia and all the Central Asian states about the importance we attach to the region and to the sovereignty and independence of our Central Asian partners. A POTUS visit would also provide for the face-to-face head-of-state contact so important in developing a trusting bilateral relationship. As an interim alternative, we would also suggest serious consideration of an invitation to President Nazarbayev to visit Washington. Kazakhstan is our most reliable partner in the region, and despite an admittedly imperfect record -- notably on democratization -- it remains a model for its neighbors, especially in such areas as how to play a constructive international role, implement serious economic reforms, attract foreign investment, and develop human capital. Nazarbayev-POTUS contact would allow us to highlight Kazakhstan's successes in these areas.     END COMMENT.

HOAGLAND